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By Edith Tucker

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JEFFERSON—Rep. Charlie Bass, a Republican of Petersborough, brought his "Democracy on the Road" to 55 constituents on Tuesday, March 22, at town hall.

The congressman said he expects to come to Coos every month, thanks to a new schedule adopted by the House of Representatives in Washington.

He had feared, Bass explained, that the horrific events in Tucson, Ariz., in which Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was severely wounded and others killed or wounded, would make elected officials and their constituents too fearful to mingle informally.

Bass said he is not fearful and will not change how he interacts with the public in any way. Earlier that afternoon Bass strolled through Shaw's Supermarket and F.B. Spaulding in Lancaster.

Coos County Sheriff Gerry Marcou and Deputy Sheriff Keith Roberge were, however, at the back of the room.

Right up front, Bass addressed two topics of high local interest: the federal prison in Berlin for which there currently are no activation or operating funds available; and the proposed Northern Pass Transmission project to bring a \$1.1 billion 1,200 megawatt high-voltage line from Pittsburg to Franklin and Deerfield.

The correctional facility was constructed "at an inopportune time," he said, because there is no appropriation for it under the Continuing Resolution (CR). Without a 2011 budget, the CR is based on a continuation of programs in the 2010 budget. Since the Berlin prison was then under construction, only capital funds for it were in that budget.

Bass pledged to work with the rest of New Hampshire's Congressional delegation to find a way to secure the needed funds as quickly as possible.

"There's a changing chemistry in Washington," he said. Twice Bass dubbed that change "a marathon" rather than "a sprint."

Bass predicted that the Northern Pass Transmission project would not be constructed as now proposed. "That's not to say I'm for or against it," Bass said, reflecting the appropriate role of a federal elected official in a project that must receive permits from federal agencies.

Foreign policy and the dollar cost of foreign aid were hot button issues. Why would President Barack Obama loan \$2 billion to Brazil for offshore oil drilling when it's been shut down – or nearly so – off U.S. shores in reaction to the Gulf of Mexico disaster, one man asked.

Why is money being spent on Tomahawk cruise missiles in an effort to establish a no-fly zone in Libya, the country that supported the terrorists responsible for the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, another asked.

Foreign earthquake and tsunami aid for Japan is humanitarian but money spent on shooting costly land-attack missiles into Libya is war, noted another constituent.

Bass characterized President Obama as being if not more aggressive than his predecessor then at least his equal.

He tried to synopsise some of the complexities of the Middle East from Morocco to Pakistan. The U.S. is very dependent on oil from the Middle East, and New England very dependent on oil to heat its homes and buildings.

Nonetheless, Libya is much more closely allied with Europe, he said, since, as a former colony of Italy, "most of its oil accrues to Europe."

The president's decision to act with NATO to bomb Libya makes him apprehensive, Bass said. He quoted an old saying, "It takes 15 minutes to get in, and decades to get out."

But, Bass admitted, if there were a vote on an emergency appropriation to support this action, it would be hard to vote "no" on principle, against the troops.

The president has said U.S. role in military action should be over very soon, Bass said, adding, however: "Don't hold your breath."

Tim Noyes of Jefferson said that he had campaigned for Bass because of his concern for the size of the national debt and the need for it to be curtailed. He and his wife both work two jobs so they will be able to send their WMRHS freshman son Adam to college, allowing him to achieve a better standard of living.

Bass agreed that debt reduction is essential. Other hot-button issues were China's currency manipulation that gives it a competitive edge as well as NAFTA—the North American Free Trade Agreement.

America could be forced into national bankruptcy at a time of China's own choosing by merely dumping all the U.S. government debt instruments that it holds, one constituent said.

But, reacting to a suggestion that trade with China be curtailed, Bass said, "If we closed our borders to China and Wal-Mart then had to triple its prices, we'd have riots in the street."

New Hampshire is big exporter of goods, he pointed out.

Bass did not agree with those who urged that the income tax rates be raised on those with incomes in the nation's top one or two percent. Those with the highest incomes pay the lion's share—almost 50 percent—of income taxes with over 50 percent at the bottom not paying any

income taxes as all, he said. Wage earners do pay into Medicare and Social security, however.

"People with money do not put it under a mattress; they invest it," Bass said. "Rather than raising revenue, Congress needs to get spending under control," he said.

Bass spoke out sharply against indulging in "class warfare," in which taxing the rich is seen as a solution.

Ann Hawthorne of Lancaster angrily said that she is "tired of hearing this twaddle."

Another constituent said, however, that the desire to level everyone's net worth would turn the U.S. into another Cuba.

Medicaid, which Bass described as the only entitlement program to which nobody directly contributes, was discussed. One couple asked about the Medicaid gap that looms ahead for their teenager who has had multiple seizures and lives in a residential center three hours away.

What will become of him when he reaches 18, they asked, worried that their child will either have to be cared for at a home or placed in a nursing home.